

NEWS FROM THE FRONT



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U.S. Army Support to the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) Program



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This News from the Front article briefly discusses the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program and the 1-153's mission in support of ACOTA. Specifically, this paper provides an example of U.S. Forces deployed to Africa engaging in a train and assist role to prepare a Ugandan mortar platoon for its upcoming peacekeeping mission to Somalia. This article can be used by small unit leaders deploying to Africa to prepare themselves and their units for an ACOTA mission.

Two takeaways:

- 1) There are language barriers. Having an interpreter is key, but so is having teaching material in both English and translated into the native language. This will assist in the teaching, understanding, and learning processes.
- 2) Many African country armies have Russian or Chinese weapons. Uganda had both. It is important to know what type of equipment the host nation has. The U.S. force deploying on an ACOTA mission should include in its pre-deployment training the specifics of foreign weapons or equipment if that is the focus of the train and assist mission.

The 1-153 Infantry's military-to-military engagement directly supported US Africa Command (USAFRICOM) Theater Campaign Plan, Line of Effort (LOE) #5 Intermediate Military Objective (IMO) 5.3, *"African partners who regularly contribute to Peacekeeping Operations and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (PKO/HADR) are willing and capable of deploying and sustaining their own forces either within the region or across the continent with USAFRICOM assistance."*

The ACOTA program is funded and managed by U.S. Department of State (DOS). The initiative is designed to improve African militaries' capabilities by providing selected training and equipment necessary for multinational peace support operations. U.S. Africa Command supports the ACOTA program by providing military mentors, trainers, and advisors at the request of State Department.¹

The U.S. Army supporting the ACOTA program has directly trained over 8,400 Ugandan troops for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) deployment. These troops composed four of the six Ugandan battle groups that have gone to Somalia (training for a seventh group begins later in the summer). One of the six battle groups was trained by ACOTA-training Ugandan cadre. The Army under ACOTA has also trained all eight Burundian battalions (approximately 7,000 troops) that have deployed with AMISOM, and is now training two additional battalions. Under State Department guidance, ACOTA training for AMISOM contributing nations aim to deliver "high-end" U.N. Chapter Seven Peace Enforcement with counterinsurgency training. In addition to the core peacekeeping training package, AMISOM contributors have received training on military operations on the urban terrain; enhanced counter-improvised explosive device (C-IED) techniques; obstacle identification and clearance; enhanced force protection; enhanced combat convoy training; combat medical procedures; and counterinsurgency tactics.

¹<http://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/security-cooperation/acota-africa-contingency-operations-training-and-assistance>

“Troop contributors have requested cultural awareness training, and they are provided with the basic language training to facilitate interoperability.”²

In preparation for their upcoming AMISOM, the Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) endured a 12-week pre-deployment course under ACOTA that entailed combat lifesaver (CLS), basic infantry skills, support and logistics, field artillery, military police, C-IED, and land navigation, with specialized training in basic mortar skills and fire direction center (FDC) procedures.

In February 2017, the 1-153 Infantry Regiment, Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), conducted a two-week basic mortar and FDC training. The noncommissioned officer in charge (NCOIC) said, “The training conducted was to maximize efficiency and to improve African military capabilities by providing select training and equipment necessary for multinational peace support operations.” Uganda is one of the five troop contributing countries (TCCs) supporting AMISOM.

I asked the NCOIC what the primary skill sets covered in the subject matter expert (SME) exchange were and he said, “I went as the indirect fire infantryman (mortarman) subject matter expert. The primary mission was to teach through the UPDF leadership, supervise and refine as needed, and allow the leadership to make decisions. In doing so, soldiers of the Defense Force can look up to their leaders for guidance and have a face on the ground to take orders from. Even with the language barrier, the UPDF gained in-depth knowledge in leadership, command and control, fire support planning and coordination, target effects, and tasks to subordinates.” From the time the NCOIC arrived until his departure, the Ugandan Battle Group (UGABAG) 22 learned several different tactics on employing indirect fire. Several key tasks such as call for fire, direct laying a mortar, emplacing a mortar platoon, and most important of all, initiating a fire mission with the M9 plotting board. With the U.S. Army’s emphasis on the train-the-trainer concept, the UPDF schoolhouse at Camp Singo will be able to train and sustain the next UGABAG that comes through.

The two major objectives were:

- Conduct refresher training so units maintain their capabilities and train-the-trainer so they can train themselves in tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTP)
- Maintain proficiency while deployed in support of AMISOM

When asked if train-the-trainer was the best method of delivery for this type of training, the NCOIC replied, “Absolutely. The train-the-trainer can continue to train the force way after we, the U.S., pulls out of the area of operation. They can also track results on progress. Most of all the important part is training through the leadership, so that they can be leaders and be looked up to.”

² Boone, Kristen E.; Hug, Azziz; Lovelace, Douglas C. (2012). Terrorism Commentary on Security Documents, vil. 124, Pg., 494 U.S Approaches to Global Security Challenges. New York, NY: Oxford University Press Inc.

Ugandan Battle Group 22 is equipped with both Russian and Chinese weapon systems. According to the NCOIC, the weapon systems that the UPDF used, Russian and Chinese, were in need of regular maintenance, but were serviceable. There were several models of AK-47s, older Chinese-made mortar systems that needed routine maintenance, but were still serviceable. He further stated that the mortar rounds came in standard size, but weighed differently, some lighter, some heavier, causing the rounds to be off target even with correct firing data on the guns. They learned to use the same weighted rounds consecutively so fire corrections were not as drastic and to put rounds on target effectively.

The NCOIC described how the UPDF operated before and after the training. When it came to execution the UPDF soldiers were very proficient in their duties. Before training they would not, for any reason, conduct any counteractions without direction from an officer. He said, "One morning the training camp was under attack by a prober firing at the UPDF and they did not fire back until told to do so, several crucial minutes later."

I asked the NCOIC if the UPDF live fired and he said, "There was a live fire event conducted for four days. Three days was training and the fourth day was the actual culminating event with base defense live fire, mass casualty exercise, and the live fire for the assault force conducting a raid. Before each and every live fire, the leadership would conduct misfire procedures and primary marksmanship instruction."

The training provided by the U.S. Army under ACOTA is vital to the success and stability of East Africa. With violent extremist organizations disrupting the progress that AMISOM has made and tarnishing the trust the people have in their government, the goal of AMISOM is to stabilize Somalia and turn control over to the Somalia National Army.